



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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HEALTH NOTES.

BY H. LAING GORDON, M.D.

PHYSICAL FADS.

THERE are some persons for whom anything in the nature of a new system has overpowering attractions; there are others who cannot resist whatever is dubbed a reform; while there are again others who, while scorning to run after advertised goods which may make no higher pretensions than that they are worth a guinea a box, will yet eagerly peruse the quasi-scientific literature with which some cunning advertiser puffs his wares, and end by becoming purchasers in the belief that here at last is something both scientific and useful. To the onlooker this power of the advertiser sometimes appears to contain an element of hypnotism, whereby the suggestion is vigorously and decidedly made that a certain article is good and must be bought, and it is bought without further ado! Witness the recent sale of a much and skilfully advertised encyclopædia; the public were commanded to buy it and bought it—all ranks of them—although if they had taken the trouble to turn to the article on Africa, they would have found that it concluded by recording that as they went to press the authors regretted to have to announce the lamented death of Dr. Livingstone, and would thus have been able to gather some impression of the value of the volumes as an up-to-date work of reference.

The modern parent is surrounded and indeed assaulted by faddists if he or she be on the outlook for the best of everything for either their young or grown-up children. There are several fads which at present are talked of or are fashionable, and one or two may be mentioned by way of example.

There is a craze in certain parts of the metropolis at present for gymnastic systems, and some parents not only march their children off to gymnasiums, but actually join classes themselves; it is said that any day rows of fashionable matrons may be seen in appropriate garb lying on the floor of a west-end gymnasium with their toes in the air under the command of an autocratic instructor, who is reaping a harvest while the fashion lasts. The system is followed the

more readily because it is said to have medical and scientific approval, the impression being that a medical opinion must necessarily also always be scientific. As a matter of fact, these gymnastic systems are introduced from abroad, where the public do not indulge in out-of-door exercises to the extent we do, and therefore often require them. Gymnastic exercises are very poor substitutes for out-of-door recreation, but are admirable as adjuncts to games, for use in wet weather, or for the treatment of physical faults, for which they are often properly prescribed. Happily, however, many of the deformities which are cured by gymnastics are now prevented by the abolition of the faults which cause them, and it is to be hoped the time is not far distant when it will be generally recognized that practically no children ought to require gymnastics. As to adults—if some persons think gymnastics and systems of “physical culture” a short cut to physical health, well and good: nobody will trouble to undeceive them; but ordinary people will always prefer tennis, cycling and such exercises. There will always be persons who are short-sighted in this, as in other directions, and think themselves scientific and in advance of the age. There are actually some who will confidently assert of a morning that the wind is in the east, not because they have observed it to be so, but because the newspaper forecast says it ought to be so.

There is another little craze amongst well-intentioned persons—that for anatomical boots and other kinds of “scientific” articles of clothing. Now anatomical boots are all very well for those who wish to make their feet look hideous, or for those who have some deformity which requires them. But to say that we all ought to wear these peculiarly ugly boots is going a little too far in the “scientific” direction. Boots of the ordinary shape, neat and useful, need never produce deformed feet, if properly made and fitted; many persons have perfectly normal feet within boots and shoes with toes so pointed as to make the faddist weep to look upon them. If some persons make martyrs of themselves because they are not courageous enough to see that their bootmaker provides them with suitable boots, that is no reason why the rest of us should be made martyrs at the bidding of the

faddist. Anatomical boots are, like gymnastics, chiefly for therapeutic use, and to be seen in them is in itself a confession of infirmity.

Then, again, we hear a little about the absurdity of ladies riding side-saddle, when it is so much more "rational" to ride cross-saddle. This is a reform for which there have been spasmodic outcries in the last ten years or more; but, happily, it never seems likely to become established. As a matter of fact, there is not very much in the majority of the objections urged against cross-saddle riding for ladies, and, no doubt, the bulk of womankind might ride astride without any harm. Indeed, women who have travelled much, and required to be for long hours in the saddle, have generally adopted the man's position, with gain in comfort. But for ordinary riding in this country the woman will generally prefer to ride as her sisters do, and in the manner which time and custom have proved to be the best and the most elegant for the ordinary use of her sex. If the rival methods are practically equal in efficacy and safety for common use, the average woman will, it is to be hoped, always be guided by the natural female instinct, to adopt the one in which she looks the best, and certainly no man will blame her!

Quite another reform has been suggested by the head-master of a well-known Scottish school, who stated in the *Spectator* that he found collars impeded the breathing of the boys under his care, and gave us to understand that he prohibited their use. There is not the slightest doubt that collars and all articles of clothing upon the upper part of the trunk limit the freedom of the respiratory act, but only to a practically inappreciable extent insufficient to check the development of the healthy youth. Tight collars and tight clothing generally must, of course, be avoided at any time, but there is no necessity to discard collars altogether because a faddist has discovered, what everyone else knew before, that they slightly impede respiration. By common consent collars are not worn when hard physical exercise, requiring free breathing, is undergone. But he would be a bold schoolmaster, indeed, who would march his boys collarless to church on a Sunday, and his logic might land him in trouble, for it would certainly lead him to discard all clothing for his growing boys, which might be rational, but would certainly be retrogressive.

OUR WORK.

House of Education.—Will ladies wishing for Probationers for a month or six weeks of the summer holidays, either to take the place of students or otherwise, apply as soon as possible to the Secretary, House of Education.

Conference.—The Annual Conference will be held on May 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th, at St. Martin's Town Hall, Charing Cross. For full particulars see advertisements, pages ii. and iii. Local Secretaries are requested to note these dates.

The Seventh Annual Natural History Exhibition will be on view at St. Martin's Town Hall, on Tuesday, May 15th, 1 to 3 p.m., and Wednesday, May 16th, 1 to 5 p.m. Contributions of Nature Note-books, Drawings, Collections and other suitable exhibits are invited from adults as well as from children. A lecture to children will be given on Wednesday, May 16th, at 3 p.m., by the Rev. Theo. Wood, F.E.S., on "A Country Walk," with crayon illustrations. All particulars can be had from Mrs. Henry Perrin, 23, Holland Villas Road, London, W.

Aunt Mai "at home" to her nephews and nieces, Saturday, May 12th, at 50, Porchester Terrace, W., 3 to 6 p.m.

Miss Stewart Wood will be "at home" to the members of her Painting Correspondence Class, and their friends, on the afternoon of Saturday, May 19th.

BOOKS.

Unwritten Laws and Ideals, edited by E. H. Pitcairn (Smith, Elder and Co., 7/6). Probably we all have an unconfessed curiosity when brought face to face with a notable professional man as to what is his ideal with regard to his profession, how far his ideal would compare with our unformed one for him, and how far his ideal has operated in making him what he is,—in a word, we assume not only a personal but a professional ideal in successful lives. That is why Miss Pitcairn's book makes so ready an appeal. We are not at all sure that judges and ambassadors, vice-chancellors and head-masters, artists and bankers, are the sort of people who disclose all that is in them for the benefit of the public; whether, for example, Sir Herbert Stephen is not consciously throwing a little dust in our eyes about *Judges*. But, be this as it may, the notion seems to have taken with a number of important people very well able to make disclosures about their several professions. Sir Edward Malet writes about *Ambassadors*; The Bishop of Calcutta about *Schoolmasters*; Mr. G. F. Watts, R.A., about *Art*; Mr. Alfred Waterhouse about *Architects*. *The Army, The Navy, The House of Lords, The House of Commons, The Clergy*, all have their interpreters, and everyone writes, not only what is interesting and instructive, but what should stimulate the reader to do his own particular best. Some of the papers should take rank among literary essays for their style. We do not think any of the writers have been betrayed into the failure in reticence which